



A History of the World
in Four-Line Feeds:
Part 18

Tom Corrado

My birthday is on a Monday.

- Graffiti on wall in parking lot

Now what? Now what do we do?
Do you believe everything you've heard about him?
About her?
About people in general?

About the Burning Man?
I don't know.
And where do we go from here?
I mean just check out *YouTube*.

Provided of course your entity allows streaming videos.
Well, yes, they may allow them but believe you me you'll be on the clock.
It's all about time and attendance.
It's always about time and attendance.

But, hey, I'm nobody, who are you?
I'm your waiter.
Well, it's about time.
And attendance?

Repetition, the conundrum.
The what?
He had this vision of a woman on the breakers with an umbrella.
It was a scene from a well-known diorama.

Look around the bookstore at your leisure, she said.
She pronounced it *lehzure*.
Just back from the book tour
he noticed his shins were skinned.

Rotating his hand slightly at the end of the pour
he discovered a spoiler
approaching the station.
The Last Station?

Yes, *The Last Station*.
Which incidentally is as the Brits would say *smahshing*.
I'd walk a mile for Helen Mirren.
Actually, more than a mile.

How much more?
Hard to say.
Really!

Cut to the scene of the empty railroad platform, please. Quickly!

Dylan strumming *Good car to drive after a war*.
Here comes that injunction I warned you about.
I'm sure he'll skate through it.
With some intractable community service?

I suppose.
As dissected on page 12?
Yes, as dissected on page 12.
And that too,

and three, four, maybe even five extra innings.
No more George, though.
Sad, indeed.
Lots of coverage, yes?

Opening Day is always exciting.
You were there, weren't you?
At least I thought you were there
brandishing an elephant gun

as if a line had been drawn.
As if a die had been cast.
So we skipped a few parts, so what?
To cut to the chase, so to speak?

I guess.
Wait, you mean like Steve McQueen in *Bullit*?
Was he cooperative?
As cooperative as Steve could be.

On a good day? With Ali?
Here comes Erich Segal. Ask him.
Act 1 Scene 2. Action!
Slow down!

Did someone interview Hannibal after he crossed the Alps?
Yes, I believe it was Jodie Foster.
One of her texts mentioned something about a summer frock.
I think you'd look good in one.

Reminds me of *The Girls in their Summer Dresses*.

Which isn't about girls in their summer dresses!
Why do they do that?
Do what?

The other morning, for example, a flock of birds flew from the trees
with the message *It's never too late*.
You've been Potter-ized!
What's a group of vampires called?

Yes, I've had my share of vampires.
And German Expressionist films?
And Max Schreck? And Count Orlok?
Yes. Yes. And yes.

Now there's a classic.
I remember watching it one summer evening
and thinking about a text message I received.
From a girl in a summer dress?

There was nothing outside the text.
Meaning?
Let me back up a bit.
The checkout line has bottlenecked

and I'm thinking about the last line in the romance novel
that floated in over the transom last night:
The moment passed.
Surely, someone will throw a hissy fit.

But what about the fit and finish
of the models rolling into showrooms as we speak?
Is there a lesson to be learned?
So long as it's value-added.

The famous late-in-the-novella Updikian switch?
The what?
You know, where Ed and Eunice emerge from the pool
to the open mouths of their respective spouses.

So that's it?
Not necessarily. But that was then.
Yes? And?
And this is now.

Aha!
Take out your drawing pad.
Time to capture what the eye - your eye - sees.
Begin.

The speeding bullet?
Nonsense.
Pictures of nothing?
Pictures of nothing.

Abstraction is, after all, denial.
What?
Deciding what *not* to include.
Pay attention.

The joy and sorrow are undeniable.
The imprecision seems to toggle some switch
and before you know it, you're floored.
By what?

Words.
Armatures for what comes next.
There have been others, you know.
Little matter, though, now with the impasse.

So what remains?
What always remains.
Messages wilting on machines.
Resetting the system will wipe out everything.

Including my drafts?
Everything!
Not to worry, though.
Huh?

You'll have plenty of time later.
Have you read his latest?
Replete with line drawings
as if Klee himself had been out for yet another stroll?

He should have known better
than to try to capture the detritus
rattling around his brain.

He's not like everyone else, you know.

No one is.

The buy one get ones?

The heads under water?

Scribbling love songs on half shells

between rounds of cribbage?

Where *do* they all come from?

What are you talking about?

Your next soulmate awaits you on *Match.com*.

My *next* soulmate?

There are far too many loopholes.

Besides, the ending is formulaic.

How so?

A disappointment.

The experience of experience.

The what?

Rewind the tape.

To the beginning?

Yes, to the beginning.

A shower in April or May or June.

I remember the wet, preposterous sun

the declensions with their inane iterations
someone's PO Box.

A bishop moved to Queen Four.

He delivered his opening lines from a futon.

The Queen was intrigued.

She was familiar with double headers
and the ways of the poloi.

The who?

Something frightened them.

Something hidden under permutations
of hay and text and half-eatens.

Ad deum qui laetificat juventutem meam.

Stop that!

But I find it comforting.
The starchy surplice.
The wooden kneeler.

It was all there.
Everything I would ever need was there.
Where?
Back then.

You were spinning your wheels.
Some redhead started gyrating to Van Halen's *Unchained*
mumbling
The proper amount is yet to be withheld.

Later you parlayed some cock-and-bull fetish into a gawker blog.
But my topspin was perfect.
Yes, but the ball, nonetheless, flopped over the net.
Limp.

It always seems to hit me at checkout.
What?
Acquaintances exchanging incidental information.
About what?

I don't know.
Condiments.
Erectile dysfunction.
Which way to insert a roll of toilet paper into a holder.

The stories collide
like shadowy torsos with arms and legs akimbo.
I want to tell them about *WikiLeaks*
and how it could help them.

With what?
How should I know?
The Periodic Table.
Henry IV: Act 2 Scene 4:

*Do thou stand for my father
and examine me upon the particulars
of my life!*
The particulars?

Precipitants of countless dreams and delusions
to say nothing of trips to Google.
Enough to fill all the spiral notebooks
of some bearded bespectacled analyst

who lusts after the memory of Bertha Pappenheim.
Bertha who?
Bertha Pappenheim. Anna O.
Oh.

Freud and Breuer's mealticket.
Would you mind if I regressed?
In full view of the audience?
Why not?

You mean like Harry Houdini?
Did he ever return?
He promised Bess he would.
Nope. Apparently he'd forgotten his PIN.

A stretch limo.
A what?
He left in a stretch limo.
I've been accused of channel surfing

and biting my nails.
And worse.
Worse?
I've been accused of stink eye.

Stink eye?
Yes, stink eye.
I'd like seconds if I may.
We don't have time.

Look in the clock!
What?
The clock.
Look in the clock!

The Hardy Boys.
Who?
The Hardy Boys.

While the Clock Ticked.

I had the whole series - all 190 original mysteries.

Yes, and?

A connection.

A possible connection.

Pass the daguerreotypes, please.

We need all the help we can get.

Holmes and Watson.

221B.

Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce -

my favorites.

Did something happen

at the fork in the road?

Was a CIA graduate involved?

Will we ever know?

Wait. There are voices in the walls.

What?

Voices in the walls.

Listen.

Is this as it should be

or as it should have been?

I have no idea.

Did I say something to upend you?

I don't think so.

Just keep reading the book

from sea to shining sea.

It's all there:

all the questions,

all the answers.

A team of horses.

Where?

A team of horses

cantering through the afternoon.

Ladies and gentlemen!

Hedge your investments!
No cab awaits your departure.
No bell ends the round.

The season has changed.
The community room has been repainted and readied
for incoming Freshmen
ill-formed products of texting

truncated, housebroken.
Laden with knock-offs?
Gloomier than Milton.
Idols of the kings and queens of darkness.

Last night, a woman appeared in my dream.
Barcode tattooed to her cheek.
Kindle embedded in her thigh.
Hijacked with wonder and glitz.

I was entranced.
She was trying to tell me something.
Something about the old neighborhood.
What?

A vase of delphiniums on the table.
My mother climbing the stairs.
The hiss of the stove.
Kukla Fran and Ollie!

You can't go home again!
Why?
Edits, redos, rehabs, regrets!
I warned you!

Time for another patdown.
Already?
If they want to, they will.
You know it as well as I.

Yes, but what about escape?
Not a chance.
But it's worked for some.
Name one.

I can't right now.
But I know I know.
All glory is fleeting.
Huh?

George C.
It was here. The battlefield was here.
Stop it!
Your memories will collect dust.

Irregularities will intrude.
Wrong numbers.
Misplacements.
Things will fade.

Become sepia'd.
Do I have a choice?
None.
The clock is relentless.



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